



### THE BIG IDEA

We're called to be for others.

### THE BIBLE

Genesis - Jeremiah 1:1-9, 29:4-11;  
John 3:16-17; Psalm 103:3

## WHAT? What are we talking about today?

### ACTIVITY | Us or Them

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Just like last week, split your students into two teams and open with a game that pits half of your students against the other half. Which game you play doesn't matter. You could choose one of your group's all-time favorite games, or play this week's recommended game (Eggstravaganza). Directions are found on Central's curriculum page.*
- **NOTE:** The game instructions suggest using plastic Easter eggs to play this game, which you may do if you have them. They are not required – simply cut out, fold and use the number papers provided in your supply envelope.
- *The goal should be to get students to embrace a friendly but competitive "us versus them" attitude. If you want to make this an ongoing theme throughout this series, you might . . .*
  - *Split your group into two teams for the duration of the series.*
  - *Give your teams a team mascot or a team color (red and blue).*
  - *Ask each team in a call-and-response, "Who's going to win?" ("Us!") "Who's going to lose?" ("Them!")*

### QUESTION | Have you ever been given the silent treatment?

- Hopefully you didn't get so competitive with that game that you and your opponents are no longer on speaking terms.
- I don't know what you think about this, but I hate getting the silent treatment.
- **Tell me I'm not the only one. Have you ever been given the silent treatment?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Prompt students to respond with a show of hands or ask a few to share a story.*

### VIDEO | A Clip from *Full House*

- In a disagreement, not everyone is the silent-treatment type. Some people yell and scream, or trash each other on social media, or try to settle it with a fight after school.
- Or maybe this is more your style . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play the first 55 seconds of [this video clip](#), where DJ creates a dividing line down the center of her and Stephanie's room. Or use another similar clip that you love!*
- How we fight might be different, but we all have this in common — when we're in conflict with others, we tend to draw battle lines between "us" and "them."



### **STORY** | Talk about a time when you caused a conflict with someone else.

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time when you caused or escalated a conflict with someone else, and share why you regret it.*
- Last week, we started a new series that's all about this tendency we all have to go through life with an "us or them" mentality.
- With people and with God, we're often quick to see others like our enemies, but God invites us to see things differently.

### **DISCUSSION**

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give your students a few moments to share in pairs or as a group. To close, ask a few students to summarize what they discussed, and then share your own thoughts.*
- **What's the dumbest reason you've ever gotten into a fight with someone?**
- **What are some unhealthy ways you've seen people handle their disagreements with, or dislike for, each other?**
- **What's one reason we might view someone else as different, intimidating, or even an enemy?**

## **SO WHAT?** *Why does it matter to God and to us?*

### **OBJECT LESSON** | "OR" to "FOR" Cardboard Letters

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Using the cardboard letters from Week 1, spell the words "or" and "for" for emphasis as you teach.*
- There are a lot of reasons why we sometimes draw imaginary battle lines between ourselves and others. Maybe it's because someone doesn't treat us well, or look like us, or believe like us, or act like us.
- When God created everything, humans were designed to be in relationship with God and with each other. But we messed that up.
  - We created dividing lines between us and God.
  - We created dividing lines between us and others.
- We've always had a tendency to make enemies. We act like our survival depends on seeing the world through the lens of, "It's me or you — and I choose me."
- But God doesn't operate that way. God looks at us and says, "**It's not 'me or you.' It's 'Me for you.'**"

### **SCRIPTURE** | Genesis - Jeremiah (a summary)

- Last week we talked about how God is for us, and has always been for us. From the beginning of history, God had a plan in place to restore the relationships we'd broken, both with God and with each other.
- We talked about how God's promise to Abraham was part of that plan.
  - **God promised to make Abraham's descendants a great nation**, which God did. The nation of Israel grew for generations and generations. But that's not all God promised.



- **God told Abraham he'd be blessed**, and here's why: God was going to bless Israel so Israel could bless the whole world.
- This idea would have been completely new and revolutionary. The nations of the world were definitely not trying to figure out how to bless each other — they were trying to destroy, conquer, and enslave each other!
- Last week, we left Abraham at the moment God called him to leave his land, people, and identity, and follow God on a new adventure. And Abraham did! If we were watching a Disney movie, this is where the credits would roll and we'd say, "And he lived happily ever after." But that's not what happened.
  - Israel got off to a slow start, but eventually Abraham's descendants grew into a large nation.
  - Then they were enslaved by Egypt.
  - Then God rescued them.
  - Then they wandered in the desert for 40 years, waiting for God to lead them to the land God promised to give Abraham's descendants.
  - Finally, the nation of Israel got some land and a king. They had a few kings, actually, and things seemed to be going well.
- But hundreds of years after God's original promise to Abraham, the nation of Israel kept screwing things up.
  - Over and over again, Israel turned its back on God, choosing to create their own rules, instead of submitting to God's authority.
  - Plus, they kept forgetting the part of God's promise that said, "you will be a blessing" to everyone on earth. **Instead of being a blessing, Israel hurt and oppressed others.**
- So God sent prophets — people who challenged God's people to get serious about following God and fulfilling God's promise to be *for* others. **But even with the prophets, Israel struggled to learn.**
- God never stopped being *for* Israel, but being *for* someone means you're *for* their growth — and sometimes helping someone grow means letting them experience the consequences of their own actions.
- So God allowed the nation of Israel to be taken captive and enslaved once again — this time by the nations of Babylon and Assyria.

### **SCRIPTURE** | Jeremiah 1:1-9, 29:4-11

- In their captivity, God sent a prophet named Jeremiah to speak a message Israel needed to hear, but wasn't going to like.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Jeremiah 1:1-9 together, followed by Jeremiah 29:4-7.*
- For a second, imagine that our country was taken over by an enemy nation — and a pretty evil one. Imagine that *your* beloved land is now *theirs* — you are suddenly in enemy territory. Imagine how much you would hate them and pray for their destruction. That was how Israel felt.
- But Jeremiah tells Israel to do something completely counterintuitive, and maybe even offensive to the angry Israelites. Jeremiah told them . . .
  - Make your home here, in enemy territory.
  - Build houses and settle down.



- Turn your enemies into friends.
  - Take care of the land.
  - Plant gardens.
  - Seek peace.
- You can't do any of those things overnight. They would take time, intention, and love. Instead of hoping their enemies would be destroyed, God told them to hope that their enemies would be blessed.
- When Israel wanted to say, "It's us or them," Jeremiah said, "No — it's us *for* them. Because **we're called to be *for* others.**"
- God was reminding Israel of the very thing God had promised Abraham so long ago: God's people would do things differently. **God's people would be *for* others, just like God had been *for* them.**
- But here's the thing: Israel didn't believe it. They (and a few false prophets) were convinced God would rescue them and destroy their enemies any minute, so it would be ridiculous to try and make peace or get comfortable. They didn't care about Babylon — they cared about themselves.
- Israel wanted their enemies destroyed, but God had something better in mind.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Jeremiah 29:10-11 together.*
- God's plans didn't look like Israel's plans. They would be in captivity for 70 more years, but God said those plans were not meant to harm them, but to give them a hope and a future.
- Does that last verse sound familiar at all? I hear it a lot at graduations or when someone is going through something difficult. Sometimes this verse is quoted in context, but it's usually not.
  - Jeremiah 29:11 isn't a promise that God is someday going to make all of our dreams come true.
  - **Jeremiah 29:11 is a reminder about who God is (*for* us) and who God's people are called to be (*for* others).**
- Just like God is for us, **we are called to be *for* others.** This has been God's message from the beginning.

### DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give your students a few moments to share in pairs or as a group. To close, ask a few students to summarize what they discussed, and then share your own thoughts.*
- **Why is it so revolutionary that God tells us to be "*for*" others — even our enemies?**
- **Think about a time when you were quick to be defensive or make an enemy out of someone else. What could you have done differently to be *for*, instead of *against*, them?**
- **Read Psalm 103:8. What's one situation or relationship where you need help responding to someone the same way God responds to you?**



### SCRIPTURE | John 3:16-17

- Many years after Jeremiah, God showed us exactly what it looks like to be *for* the people who are supposed to be your enemies.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read John 3:16-17 together.*
- Jesus entered enemy territory to show us that God is for us. Now God calls us to do the same — to make friends with our enemies, to make our home in a place that's not our own, and to seek the peace and wellbeing of everyone around us.
- **God calls us to be *for* others.**

### NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

#### YOU'RE CALLED TO BE FOR OTHERS

- Through Jesus, God showed us what it means to be *for* others. But how can we follow Jesus' example? How can we be *for* people and not against them? Maybe you . . .
  - **RESOLVE A CONFLICT.** Identify a battle line that has been drawn between you and someone else, and then cross it — not with hostility, but with forgiveness, humility, and peace.
  - **MAKE A FRIEND.** Cross that imaginary boundary line and sit with, talk to, or say hello to someone new.
  - **LEARN FROM SOMEONE NEW.** Notice someone who thinks, lives, or was raised differently than you, and then pursue a friendship — not so you can change them to be more like you, but so you can learn and grow together, through your similarities and your differences.
  - **SHARE WHAT YOU HAVE.** Like God blessed Israel so Israel could bless others, how can you give to others from the things you've been given?
- This way of living is radical, but it's what the world needs. So how can you be *for* people, like God is *for* you?

#### DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give your students a few moments to share in pairs or as a group. To close, ask a few students to summarize what they discussed, and then share your own thoughts.*
- **What's one conflict you need to resolve right now?**
- **What's one way you can show you're for others by making a new friend?**
- **Who is someone new you can learn from? What makes them different from you, and what do you hope to learn from them?**
- **What's something we can do together to share what we have with others?**