

# Session 1

(40 mins)

**Aim:** The Bible claims that we fall short of God's standard for how to treat our neighbours. This session gives space to consider whether this is a fair assessment.

## Intro (4 mins)

Think of your own recent example to share where you have not loved people and treated them in the way you long for them to treat you. Practice telling your story in under 90 seconds. If possible, think of an example that the pupils will recognize.

### Example:

This morning, my nine year old daughter was being really slow to get up, eat her breakfast and get ready for school. We were going to be late and I was stressed. I started nagging her. Then I praised her brother and his ability to get ready promptly in a way that must have felt really mean and painful for my daughter. In the end, I shouted at her. As we walked to school, I lectured her on how she had made us all have a bad start to the day and I made her think about what she could do to stop it from happening again.

After I dropped her off, I was thinking about these sessions. In our Bible story it says: 'Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbour as yourself'. My family are the people I love the most. But despite this, I had behaved really meanly. I sent my daughter off to school upset because of how I treated her. If I had been in her shoes, I would have wanted my mum to understand that I had not slept well, that I was anxious about school today and that I really wanted a hug, some kindness and some help to get ready. I totally failed to love her in the way I would want to be loved.

Draw out from your story how you struggled to treat someone who you love very much in the way you would want to be treated.

- This session, we are going to think about:
  - Times when we have not been treated with kindness.
  - Times when we have not treated others with the kindness we want to receive.
- I wonder if already you can think of a time this week when you have not treated your friends, your siblings or your parents with the kindness you would like them to give you? (Give them a bit of silence to personally ponder this.)

## Establishing Safety (3 mins)

Seek to create a safe space for the session by setting some ground rules:

- Nothing to identify others e.g. no names, be careful over story details.
- You do not have to contribute if you feel uncomfortable.
- No blaming.
- No repeating things afterwards that are shared in the group (confidentiality).

## Warm Up: Emotional Sculptures (15 mins)

- Pair up the pupils and stand together in a spacious circle facing in.
- Pupil A is the 'clay' and must follow the directions of their sculptor.
- Pupil B is the 'sculptor'. When you say 'create' they must give instructions to sculpt their partner to display the emotional reaction to the scenario you paint.

- Use your intro story as the example. E.g. ‘Your mum shouts at you for being late for school and then nags you’. The sculptor might ask for furrowed eyebrows, a flat mouth, eyes glaring, arms folded, etc..
- Give the pupils their first scenario and then count down 20 seconds aloud to give them thinking time. Say ‘create’. Pupils then have one minute to form their sculpture.
- ‘Freeze’ - the pupils stop work and the ‘clay’ must hold their sculpted pose without moving.
- ‘Sculptors’ sit in front of their clay statue.
- Go round the circle. Praise features that have captured the emotional response well. Talk about the big emotions that are conveyed – when we feel them, and also when we cause others to feel this way through our actions.
- Swap roles and try out another scene.

#### **Possible scenarios:**

- (Sadness/envy/loneliness) A close friend tells you that you are their best friend. But then they don’t invite you to their party. Your other friends are invited and they discuss it excitedly at school.
- (Anger/frustration) It’s your choice for TV. Your brother grabs the remote controller and won’t give it back. When mum intervenes he deliberately farts so that you cannot enjoy watching your programme.
- (Joy) You work really hard on a piece of artwork for many hours and it wins a competition.
- (Embarrassment/shame/anger/hurt) Your dad referees your football match. He does a really bad job of it. The next day you are in the toilets and overhear some of the children discussing the game and rubbishing your dad.

#### **Cross the Circle (6 mins)**

That first task helped us to think about how we want others to treat us. This next activity flips our thinking from being the aggrieved person towards times when we might have failed to treat others well.

Before starting ‘cross the circle’, make it a safe space. Clarify that it is OK for them to simply remain in their place if at any point they do not want to cross the circle even if the statement is true for them. You will know your pupils and their contexts [[church volunteers – check with the teacher](#)] so tailor these statements or add your own accordingly. They start with more general and move to more personal responses. Go fairly fast.

#### **‘Cross the circle if you...**

- ...had toast for breakfast.
- ...love drawing.
- ...usually walk to school.
- ...play in a sports team.
- ...like eating apples.
- ...enjoy acting.
- ...look forward to maths lessons.
- ...sometimes argue with your friends.
- ...have left (or wanted to leave) someone out of a game.

- ...find your brother or sister tricky to get along with.
- ...get angry or frustrated with others when you play sport.
- ...have ever lied.
- ...have pushed in on a line.
- ...have shouted at other people when you are upset.
- ...have ever thought unkind thoughts.
- ...have ever said sorry and really meant it.
- ...wish other people saw your perspective more and understood you better.
- ...find it hard when something good happens for someone else, but not for you.

#### **Cross the circle if...**

- There was a competition to find the person who was always able to treat others kindly, and in the manner they would want to be treated – if they never ever had to say sorry because they had only ever been kind – cross the circle if you could enter that competition.

#### **So What Do We Do With This? (12 mins)**

Discuss with a friend:

- How does this leave you feeling?

Jesus taught that a good way to respond to all this brokenness and the feelings that it leaves in us was through confession and repentance.

**Confession** is a long word that simply means bringing all the hidden things out into the open:

- The times we have hurt others.
- All our patterns of behaviour that we are ashamed of.
- All the nasty thoughts we have and keep to ourselves.
- Moments we wish we could take back.
- Hurts we carry because of the brokenness of other people and the world around us.

**Repentance** is about being sorry for what we have confessed, choosing to turn away from it and approach things anew, allowing Jesus to teach us a better way to think and to live.

#### **Activity: 'Create in me a pure heart'**

This activity is designed to help pupils give voice to anything they want to privately confess. There is then a prayer that they can choose to join in with to help them process this and receive peace.

- Give each pupil the worksheet (see resource pack) with a large heart-shaped containing the verse: 'Create in me a clean heart, God' (Psalm 51v10).
- Play some gentle music and give pupils space to ponder and draw/write using **red pen/crayon** anything they want to confess/unburden themselves of/ acknowledge before God – this might be feelings, actions, thoughts, regrets, hurts.
- Explain that the Bible teaches that when we bring our whole selves to God in humility and repentance and are honest with him about how we are feeling deep inside, he offers us:

- Forgiveness.
- A fresh start.
- Peace.
- Comfort in the hurting places.
- His power (Holy Spirit) to live well.
- Pupils to staple/stick a red cellophane heart on top of their red words/drawings.



Christians often use the colour red to symbolise Jesus' blood – which he shed for mankind when he died. Christians believe that Jesus' death enabled the relationship between God and humans to be restored, meaning that we are free to receive God's forgiveness, peace, comfort, friendship and power in our lives.

- Notice how the red cellophane covers the red writing, making it invisible. Christians believe that Jesus' sacrifice covers them – their failings and weaknesses are no longer seen. There is a fresh start available to all through confession and repentance.
- Offer pupils the chance to pray. Some may not want to, and need space to be present with integrity. Two options for how to close in prayer:
  1. Make use of a confession prayer that pupils recognize from Collective Worship in school.
  2. Use the Church of England confession liturgy – the session leader can respond with the absolution ([found on the resource sheet, and also written below](#)).

**Confession** (offer opportunity to say this together)

Most merciful God,  
 we own up that we have hurt you and hurt others  
 through our thoughts, our words and our actions.  
 We have not loved you with our whole heart  
 or loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
 In your mercy, forgive what we have been,  
 help us to change for the better  
 and show us what to become.  
 May we act with fairness,  
 love mercy  
 and walk humbly with you, our God.  
 Amen

**Absolution** (said by the session leader)

May the God of love and power  
 forgive us and free us from our sins,  
 heal and strengthen us by his Holy Spirit,  
 and raise us to new life in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
 Amen.