



PRETEEN

JANUARY 2024

FOR LEADERS ONLY

GOD VIEW: THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITY AND GOD'S CHARACTER, AS SHOWN THROUGH GOD'S BIG STORY

In Psalm 24:1, David wrote, *"The earth belongs to the Lord. And so does everything in it."* (NIRV) God is the author of creation, and God has entrusted us to care for and cultivate the world we see around us. We do that by taking responsibility. From work we need to accomplish, to people we meet, to the words we use, life is filled with moments where we can decide to reflect God's character, take responsibility, and use what we have wisely. When we follow through and do what needs to be done, we can point others to Jesus, the One who took the ultimate responsibility for us and made it possible for us to be with God forever.

CORE INSIGHT: The theological foundation for RESPONSIBILITY

Transformation by the power of God's Spirit. God's Spirit is transforming my unique and imperfect life into the character of Jesus.

Taking responsibility may not come naturally to us, but God's Spirit can help us develop it in our lives as we follow Jesus and learn to live like Him.

RESPONSIBILITY is showing you can be trusted with what is expected of you.

HEADS UP: IDEAS TO KEEP IN MIND AS YOU TALK ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY WITH KIDS

Even though "fun" and "responsibility" don't seem like they'd go together, we think this could be a really great month for kids in your community. Everyone has some sort of responsibility. It could be getting homework done, or picking up after playing a board game. Other times it might look like practicing a new instrument, or caring for a hamster or puppy. For Pet Project, we hope to inspire kids to reflect God's character in the way they follow through on the work that needs to get done.

Throughout the Bible, we read a lot about how to live with responsibility. The Bible is filled with stories about people who could be trusted . . . along with others who struggled in this area. But beyond those stories, the writers of Scripture included proverbs, principles, and parables that also bring God's ideas about responsibility to life.

Sometimes these concepts are more difficult to teach because there is no story included. However, the truths we find through Solomon and Paul, along with what we discover through Jesus' parables, can be life-changing when we learn how to live them out.

It's also important to remember that we can't make promises about what will happen if we choose to put these ideas into practice. Proverbs and principles like these aren't intended to offer certainty. Instead, they demonstrate that living with wisdom creates positive natural consequences that are likely to happen when we choose to honor God and others with the responsible choices we make.



WEEK
ONE
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LARGE GROUP
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Communicator GUIDE

TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

I Want to Know What Love Is
Greatest Commandment
Matthew 22:36-40

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION

**What are things you're
expected to do?**

TODAY'S BOTTOM LINE

Love God and love others.

MONTHLY MEMORY VERSE

**"Suppose you can be trusted
with something very little. Then
you can also be trusted with
something very large."**
Luke 16:10a, NIV

MONTHLY VIRTUE

**Responsibility—Showing you
can be trusted with what is
expected of you**

BASIC TRUTH

**I should treat others the way
I want to be treated.**

WEEK 1

Key Question: **What are things you're expected to do?** Even kids have responsibilities. As they start to name them, we hope that they'll start to realize that those expectations don't exist just to frustrate them. Each of us has things we need to accomplish—including our responsibility to love one another. We pray that kids will take Jesus' words to heart as they discover how to show God's love to others.

We kick off the New Year in **Matthew 22:36-40**. The religious leaders were always trying to trap Jesus with His own words. This moment was no different. A law expert asked Jesus, out of hundreds of laws they were to follow, which one was the most important. Jesus simplified everything and defined love as the top priority. Our most important responsibility is to love God and love others as we love ourselves.

Bottom Line: **Love God and love others.** These are two simple ideas, but they're not always simple to put into practice. We hope that, as kids discover more about responsibility, they'll start to understand the ways they can love God and love the people God has put in their

LANDING

COMMUNICATOR: "Today as you go to groups, think about this:

SLIDE: KEY QUESTION

"What are things you're expected to do? Think about the sorts of things you need to do during the day. How does understanding the way Jesus spoke about loving God and loving others help us better understand what is expected of us? It's okay if you're not sure how to answer. You'll have a chance to chat with your Small Group all about this and more. Before you head there, let's pray and ask for the strength and wisdom to love God and love others well! Let's pray!"

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND



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25 MINUTES

10 MINUTES

TODAY'S BIBLE STORY

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Greatest Commandment
Matthew 22:36-40

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BASIC TRUTH

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LARGE GROUP

ENGAGE KIDS' HEARTS THROUGH A DYNAMIC AND INTERACTIVE BIBLE
STORY, WORSHIP, AND PRAYER EXPERIENCE IN A LARGE
GROUP SETTING.

AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS STUDENTS ENTER.

SLIDE: THEME

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP

Host enters . . .

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): COUNTDOWN

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME

WELCOME

Host has lots of energy as he or she welcomes everyone to [Name of Environment]. Host is relatable and inviting. Host can talk about something that happened culturally throughout the week like a big sports game, movie opening, a viral video on YouTube, etc. Host tells them how excited he or she is that they're there and briefly runs through what they can expect. This is especially helpful for first-time guests to make them feel like they know what's happening.

OPENER

HOST: "Happy New Year, friends! That's right, welcome to a brand-new YEAR here in [name of environment] 2024! We have reached the future, people! And our mission, should we decide to accept it, is to do our best and see it through! All year long we'll have opportunities to show responsibility!

"Now, I know what you might be thinking. 'Responsibility?! Are you kidding me? This is the weekend, why do we need to talk about responsibility?!' And you know what? Those aren't terrible questions to ask. But here's the thing . . . as we start a new year, it can be important to set goals and make a plan to grow and get better at life in the new year. Maybe you have chores, pets you take care of, or even a pet project (point to the Theme Slide) like a hobby, sport, or skill you're hoping to improve.

"So let's jump into our morning with a game that's all about Pet Projects . . . specifically, PETS! Who has a pet at home? (Get response) Awesome! Maybe you have a dog or cat or . . . tarantula, but whatever the pet, you have to take care of it. Here's a game all about pets . . . I call it 'Muddy Buddies!'



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SLIDE: "MUDDY BUDDIES"

"First of all, make sure you're sitting with your Small Groups. Leaders, grab an answer sheet and a pen, and get ready!"

Each group gets an answer sheet numbered 1 through 10 and a pen. Choose one person per Small Group to write the answers down.

"Alright, here is how this game will work. Have you ever accidentally let your pet cat or dog . . . or llama into the house with muddy footprints and they left tracks throughout the house? Oops! It's an unfortunate thing that goes along with having a pet. But how many of you think you could identify some pets simply by their tracks? (Get response) Well, let's give it a try.

"A set of pet tracks will appear on the screen. DO NOT yell out the answer. Instead, write it down as a group. We'll go through all 10, then we'll go through them again and see how you did! You can mark if you got it right or wrong. By the end we will see what group really knows their pet tracks. Got it?"

SLIDES: ANIMAL TRACK SLIDES #1-10

Keep the game moving. After each new slide appears, give them a brief time to discuss, and then a "3-2-1" countdown to write an answer down. After you go through the Animal Track slides, go through them again revealing the answer slide. Remind them to check if they got it right and X if they got it wrong. Provide commentary along the way and allow groups to say what they wrote down before revealing the answers. Determine a winner at the end. (Who got 4 or more right? 5 or more right? etc.)

SLIDES: ANIMAL TRACK ANSWER SLIDES #1-10

(After the game) "Well done! You all really know your muddy footprints! Looks like you've had to clean some of those up before. Well, no cleaning up footprints this morning. It's time to stand together and worship our amazing God who made all those animals we love so much!"



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WORSHIP

Worship Leaders enter as Host exits.

WORSHIP LEADER: "It's so good to see all of you here today! Right now we get to worship God together. There is something special that happens when we unite our voices together to sing God's praise. Let's not waste another second. The time is now. Sing it loud, everybody!"

AUDIO: "SING YOUR PRAISE" / TRACK 2 FROM MY LIFE FOR YOU

OPTIONAL VIDEO: "SING YOUR PRAISE" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"That's right! We can sing God's praise every day—with our voices, and also with the way we live our lives. Before we continue in worship, let's watch this.

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): LIVE LOUD VIDEO FROM GET REEL

"We have a new song to sing today. It's called 'All to You,' and it says, 'I'll give my all to You, whatever You choose for me to do.' (*Show the motions.*) We can live each day by giving our heart and soul to God, and by living the way God has taught us to live. Sing along with me as you catch on!"

AUDIO: "ALL TO YOU" / TRACK 1 FROM MY LIFE FOR YOU

OPTIONAL VIDEO: "ALL TO YOU" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO

"Listen to what Paul wrote in Romans 1:9: 'I serve God with my whole heart. I preach the good news about his Son.' (*NIV*) I want to be like Paul and give God every part of my life. If I do that, then it means God's love will be on display in my life. In fact, we can worship God by sharing God's love with the people around us. Sing this with me."

AUDIO: "LOVE ONE ANOTHER" / TRACK 7 FROM MAKE A MOVE

OPTIONAL VIDEO: "LOVE ONE ANOTHER" LIVE LYRICS OR DANCE MOVES MUSIC VIDEO



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COMMUNICATOR SCRIPT (STORY)

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND

Communicator enters as Worship Leaders exit. On stage is a white board or other spot for the "Greatest Pet Tourney"

INTRODUCTION

COMMUNICATOR: "Hey, everyone! This month is off to a great start! That was really impressive watching you all identify those pets by their footprints. But what I want to know is . . . which pet is the greatest? I'm sure that you all have opinions about what sort of pet you'd want cuddling up with you. On the count of three, everyone shout out your favorite? One, two, three! (Get response.)"

"Those are all great! But you all had different answers, so I think we need a more definitive answer. How about a little Greatest Pet Tourney!"

Communicator has names of pets written on sheets of paper (Printed from Week 1 Large Group Assets PDF) with tape and will rearrange them based on the kids' reaction. It doesn't need to be precise. Put two pets up against one another and use a side of the room to represent each one. Put the winning name higher up the board. Grab another pet and hold those two up. An example follows, but feel free to use your own examples.

"I'll hold up the names of two different animals that people might have as pets. If you would rather have this one as a pet (*left hand*) than I want you to go to this side of the room. If you would rather have this as a pet (*right hand*) than I want you to go to this side of the room. We'll figure out which is the greatest pet to have. Here we go!"

Dog/Cat
Rabbit/Ferret
Hamster/Rat
Guinea pig/Chinchilla
Snake/Tarantula
Chameleon/Turtle
Goat/Chicken
Parrot/Goldfish

Start mixing and matching some of the winners vs. the winners and losers vs. losers until you find a definitive "Greatest."

"I guess it's now official. The greatest pet of all time is [Name of Pet]!"

TENSION

COMMUNICATOR: "Seriously though, we can have some fun and laugh about what pet is the greatest. And we could certainly do the same thing with sports or athletes (*insert your personal favorites*), music or musicians (*insert your personal favorites*), or fast food restaurants (*insert your personal favorites*)! In fact, people rank things like this all the time.



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"But what about ranking how we follow Jesus? Like, when it comes to all the ways we can follow Jesus or worship God with our lives, what's the greatest, most important thing we can do? Maybe it's going to church. Or donating our money or our time to church or other organizations. Or what about reading about God in the Bible, praying, or singing worship songs to God? What's the greatest? Where should we focus our attention?"

"This is actually a great question, one that people who follow God have been asking for centuries. When we have good questions like this, it's important to search for great answers. Thankfully, we have a great starting point: the Bible. Throughout the Bible, we have all sorts of writings from people who experienced God and learned what it means to trust God. God inspired them to write about these moments for others to learn more about how they can experience God, too. Let's check out one of those moments now."

TRUTH

COMMUNICATOR: "Today, we head to the New Testament of the Bible where it talks all about Jesus. About 2000 years ago, Jesus began to travel around, healing and teaching people. MANY people were amazed at the miracles He could do but also with the things He taught. He didn't just repeat what others had said. Instead, Jesus taught as somebody with authority and created new teachings with new understandings for how people could follow God. Jesus said things they had never heard before, and in a way, they had never heard them."

"Now while many people were drawn to following Jesus and were amazed by His teachings, there were some who were very suspicious about who He was and the things He was teaching. One group who felt like that was the Jewish religious leaders known as the Pharisees. Ever heard of them? The Pharisees were EXPERTS on God's commandments. They knew the Jewish Scriptures inside and out and saw it as their job to protect God's Word and keep it pure. They started out with really good intentions. But over time, their passion to protect God's Word led them to create more and more rules in order to keep other followers of God from breaking any laws and tainting God's Word."

"Let me give you an example. I need a volunteer."

Communicator chooses a volunteer and brings them up.

"Okay (to volunteer) please put your hands out. Here is a copy of the Bible, which includes the Jewish Scriptures that the Pharisees studied and Jesus knew backwards and forwards. *(Place Bible in volunteer's outstretched hands.)* In the Bible we read all about God's story and how we can trust God fully with our lives, but the Bible also includes wisdom for how to live with the people around us. And because God created us, God has a vision for how we should live with each other. Thankfully, God didn't leave us to figure it out on our own. People who experienced God firsthand and learned from those experiences wrote them down so we could know better how to trust God with our lives and make wise choices along the way! Pretty cool, right?"

"Now let me give you an example. One of the instructions we find in here *(tapping the Bible)* is to honor your parents. We find this in the book of Exodus as part of the Ten Commandments that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai right after God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. But the Pharisees thought that command wasn't clear enough. They kept asking what does it MEAN to honor your parents? How do we know a person IS honoring their parents? *(Pulling out a large book)* And so the Pharisees would write some NEW instructions to help a person know if they were honoring their parents or not. Honoring your parents came to mean this and this and this . . . *(Putting the large book on top of the Bible in the volunteer's hands)* Here, hold this please."



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"How about another? The Ten Commandments also included an instruction about not bearing false testimony against your neighbor. In other words, don't lie and say somebody did something that they didn't do. But again, the Pharisees would want to make sure they—and everyone else—knew exactly what that looked like. They wanted to be clear: How would people know for certain they were not 'bearing false testimony?' *(Pulling out another large book)* So the Pharisees would write more instructions to clarify what it meant to bear false testimony. *(Putting on top of the Bible and other book)* Here, hold this please. Wow, that looks heavy.

"The Pharisees ended up doing this with many of God's instructions. *(Adding another book to the pile)* Property instructions. *(Another book)* What to eat. *(Another book)* What NOT to eat. *(Another book)* When to clean. *(Another book)* Sabbath law. *(Another book)* What to wear. How to farm. *(A series of several books)* Rule . . . after rule . . . after rule. Instructions upon instructions. That sure looks heavy. *(Staring at the pile but not helping.)*

"Now, let me ask you something? What challenges might come along with all these added rules and instructions?

Guide the conversation to the idea that it would be really hard to remember and keep all of them.

"Seriously! You think it's hard to remember all those dates you're trying to remember in social studies? Try memorizing all of THIS!

(To volunteer) Okay, you can set those down right here. Thanks for your help!

Volunteer sets stack down on a chair and sits down.

"Now, let's forget about memorizing this for a moment. What if I asked you to take a few minutes and SUMMARIZE it? *(Pointing at the stack)* Do you think you could do it? Well, that's exactly what Jesus did. Check this out.

"There was one particular day when the Pharisees wanted to test Jesus with a question—a question related to . . . *(points to the stack)* God's law! After all, God's law was their specialty. So they worked up a really tough question and went to Jesus. One of the law experts took the lead.

Open the Bible to Matthew 22:36 NIV and read.

"Teacher," he asked, "which is the most important commandment in the Law?"

"What a question! The Pharisee was asking *(placing hand on the pile of books)*, of ALL the commandments, all of the instructions, which one was the best one? Which was most important? But think about it, if Jesus were to pick one, then He would also be saying that the other commandments weren't AS important, which would certainly make some people angry! The Pharisee DID ask a good question, especially if he wanted to trick Jesus into getting Himself into trouble! But Jesus knew exactly how to respond. Listen to this!

Open the Bible to Matthew 22:37-38 NIV and read.

"Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind." This is the first and most important commandment."



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"Maybe at first, the Pharisees thought they got Him—that Jesus must have been saying that the commands about not lying or murdering or stealing from others didn't matter! But just wait . . . Jesus wasn't finished speaking. He continued.

Open the Bible to Matthew 22:39, (NIRV) and read.

""And the second is like it. 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself.'""

"Hold on a second . . . that's TWO commandments! They asked what the most important commandment is . . . one, singular, commandment. But it's not that Jesus is bad at math. Rather, He was making a very important point—Jesus was saying that the commandments that have to do with loving God couldn't be separated from the commandments that are about loving other people. Jesus was emphasizing that if you truly love God, then you will truly love the people God has created as much as you love yourself. And if you truly want to love people as you love yourself, you must be in a right relationship with God. And because you cannot separate them, it's like they are ONE command. Then Jesus took it a step further.

Open the Bible to Matthew 22:40, (NIRV) and read.

""Everything that is written in the Law and the Prophets is based on these two commandments.'"

"Jesus was saying that every single instruction that God gave in the Jewish Scriptures came back to loving God or loving others. There was no instruction that God gave that didn't fit one of these categories; therefore, they were inseparable. When the Pharisees heard Jesus' response, they had no defense. Jesus had passed the test.

"Now (*volunteer who is now seated*), earlier when I handed you those books, were they starting to get heavy? (*Wait for response*) Did I offer to help you? No, I didn't—how rude of me, right!? I'm sorry about that. I did that because I was hoping to make a point. You see, later on when Jesus was talking about the Pharisees, He accused them (*picking up books and pretending they are really heavy*) of creating heavy burdens for people to carry but not being willing to help them! In other words, Jesus was saying that the Pharisees claimed to love God—I mean, they took the Scriptures VERY seriously and didn't want anybody to go against God's commands. BUT in trying to make other people love God, they did not love other people. Instead, they pointed out the failures of others who didn't keep God's instructions. And Jesus called them out and said that they didn't truly love God if they didn't truly love other people. You can't have one and not the other."

"You see, Jesus knew that if you truly love God, then you will love others, too. And to truly love others, well, you have to love God first."

APPLICATION

COMMUNICATOR: "We can easily get caught in the details of all the instructions, and pretty soon we feel so overwhelmed that we forget what it is all about in the first place. But loving God doesn't have to feel so difficult. When we spend time with God, we show we love God. And there are all sorts of ways we can spend time with God: reading the Bible, enjoying God's creation, praying to God and, of course, loving other people who God created—by honoring them, showing love to them, putting them first, and helping them in all sorts of ways. When we focus on loving God and loving others, we will start to find that the rest begins to fall in place. If you love others, you will honor your parents. If you love others, you won't lie about them and say they did something they didn't . . . because then you're no longer just loving others, right? You're loving God, too. This is why Jesus said it all comes down to loving God and loving others. THIS is the greatest commandment."



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LANDING

COMMUNICATOR: "Today as you go to groups, think about this:

SLIDE: KEY QUESTION

"What are things you're expected to do?" Think about the sorts of things you need to do during the day. How does understanding the way Jesus spoke about loving God and loving others help us better understand what is expected of us? It's okay if you're not sure how to answer. You'll have a chance to chat with your Small Group all about this and more. Before you head there, let's pray and ask for the strength and wisdom to love God and love others well! Let's pray!"

SLIDE: THEME BACKGROUND

Communicator leads group in a prayer related to what they just heard. After prayer, Communicator dismisses kids to Small Group.

AUDIO: PLAY HIGH-ENERGY MUSIC AS THE KIDS EXIT.

SLIDE: THEME

OPTIONAL VIDEO (MEDIA PACKAGE): THEME LOOP