

WEEK 2

TEACHING GUIDE

ON THE
FLIP
SIDE

BIG IDEA

God flips our definition of righteousness.

BIBLE

Isaiah 58:1-9; Matthew 22:36-40;
1 Corinthians 13:1-3

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

VIDEO | A Clip of a CrossFit Handstand Sprint

- Welcome back to *On the Flip Side*, where we're talking about God flipping our lives upside down. Most of the time, following God's lead means thinking and living in a way that's so opposite, it might sometimes feel like this . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this one](#) (1:26-1:56) of a handstand sprint competition from the CrossFit Games. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)

ACTIVITY | Flip & Read

- Doing most things upside down may not come naturally to us, but there are often some real benefits – like when we try reading upside down. Researchers have shown reading upside down:
 - Helps us remember the words we've read better than if we read them right-side up.
 - Can help people who struggle with reading read more quickly and better understand what they've read.
 - Is a skill anyone can learn and improve!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Before your teaching time, collect two [buzzers](#), [poster board](#), and a list of words for students to identify. Write one word on each sheet of poster board in large letters. To make it more difficult, write some of the words backward as well. Flip your poster board stack so the words are all upside down. When you're ready to play, select two students, give them each a buzzer, and show them an upside down word. The first to hit the buzzer and read the word correctly is the winner. After five words, switch players. After a few rounds, switch up the gameplay so the poster board is held right-side up, but the players are viewing it upside down by laying on their backs with their heads hanging off tables, a row of chairs, or your stage. You can play with any words, but here are a few tricky ones to get you started:
 - Dragon

- Wow
- Mom
- Now
- Napped
- Panda
- Nugget
- Flipped

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - What's a word or phrase we use today that our grandparents would definitely have trouble defining?
 - What are some hard-to-define words you might hear at church or read in the Bible? (Anyone want to try to define any of them?)

STORY | Talk about a time you misunderstood the meaning of a word.

- Reading upside down might help us read and remember words better, but it doesn't help us define the words we're reading. Sometimes the definition is the hardest part!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time you misunderstood the meaning of a word. Try to choose an example where you were confident you were using the word correctly and were surprised to learn it meant something different. Maybe you botched the use of a popular slang term or thought "original" meant "boring" because you saw it on a bag of plain potato chips.*
- If you've spent any time reading the Bible, you've probably noticed it's full of words that aren't easy to define — like *sanctification, atonement, baptism*, and so many more.
 - You might sometimes read a term in Scripture that seems so unclear it feels like you're reading it upside down and backward.
 - Or sometimes you might be pretty confident you understand what a word in Scripture means, only to find out years later you were totally wrong.
- Today we're going to talk about a specific word in Scripture that's often misunderstood.
 - Maybe you've seen it and not know what it meant.
 - Maybe you think you know what it means but God has something new about it for you to discover.
 - Or maybe you don't really care what this word means because you're not sure what you think about God at all right now.
- No matter which perspective you're coming from, today we're going to see another way God is wanting to flip our lives upside down. This time, it all comes down to how we define one key word — and what we decide to do about it.

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

OBJECT LESSON | The Flip Board (Part 1)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your teaching time, you'll need sticky notes, a permanent marker, and a large [two-sided white board that can be flipped](#). On one side, write, draw, or use the Big Idea images provided in your Graphics & Video folder to display this week's Big Idea. When you're ready to teach, keep that side of the board hidden while you write students' responses to the following questions on sticky notes and attach them to the blank side.*

- Back in the '80s, the word "righteous" was used to say something was awesome, amazing, incredible – you get the idea. So what is the word "righteous" doing all over the Bible too?
 - **When Scripture says "righteous," what do you think it means?**
 - **What are some things people might do to be seen as "righteous"?**
- In the Bible, "righteous" is the word we use when someone or something is, well, *right*. Correct. Good in every way. Sometimes it's defined as "right living." But what does it mean to live "rightly"?
- That's exactly the question we humans have been trying to answer, and often getting wrong. Most of the time, it's because we reduce "righteousness" to a checklist of religious laws and rituals, thinking if we follow them all perfectly, God will be happy with us. But that's not how God defines righteousness.

STORY | Talk about a time your desire to appear "righteous" made you behave selfishly.

- If our definition of "righteousness" is all about how we can seem more good in the eyes of God (or others), we need our definitions flipped upside down.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Tell a story from your own life (or ask a volunteer or student to tell a story) about a time your desire to appear "righteous" made you behave selfishly or hurt someone else. Maybe you missed a sibling's championship game because you refused to miss church, or were judgmental to a friend when they did something you didn't agree with, or were so focused on maintaining your good image you missed an opportunity to care for someone who was hurting. Share what you regret about that decision and what kind of "righteousness" you were trying to achieve.*
- In that moment, I was so focused on myself that I failed to care for the people right in front of me. Even though I told myself my focus was on the "right" thing, I was actually focused on me.
- But I'm not the only one to get this wrong. Throughout Scripture, we see God has often had to intervene when we humans missed the point.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - *** When the Bible tells us to be "righteous," what do you think most people assume that means?**
 - *** Do you think being "righteous" is different from being "religious"? Why or why not?**

SCRIPTURE | Isaiah 58:1-9

- Back when the Old Testament was written, God's people often needed to be reminded what God's definition of "righteousness" really is. At one point, God sent the prophet Isaiah to help make their wrong understanding right.
- In Isaiah's time, it seems like God's people defined "righteousness" as "doing all the right religious things." And they were doing a pretty good job! According to Isaiah, God's people were:
 - Spending time with God regularly.
 - Wanting to hear God's words.
 - Obeying God's commands.
 - Practicing spiritual disciplines like fasting in order to get closer to God.
 - Fasting, by the way, is a spiritual discipline a lot of people practice. The idea is to give something up, for a short period of time, in order to better focus on God.

- When you read about fasting in the Bible, it usually is referring to adults choosing to give up food for a period of time. Instead of eating food during their fast, they would spend time in prayer instead.
- In the passage we're about to read, God's people have a complaint that has to do with their fasting. Even after doing all the "right" religious practices, God's people didn't feel any closer to God. They didn't think God was listening to their prayers. They didn't trust God was watching out for them. And they weren't happy about it!
 - In their eyes, they did all of the "righteous" things they were supposed to do – but, for some reason, they didn't think God cared. To help set them right, here's what God said through the prophet Isaiah.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Isaiah 58:1-9.*
- Isaiah isn't holding back on the honest feedback God's people needed to hear. Isaiah makes it clear God heard their prayers, but God wasn't happy with their behavior. They *seemed* like they were doing a lot of the "right" things, like fasting, but they were also:
 - Being selfish.
 - Exploiting others.
 - Fighting.
 - Harming each other.
 - Using their fasts to try to earn God's attention and favor.
- They had missed the entire point of a fast! According to God, the point of their fast should have been to:
 - Practice humility.
 - Fight against injustice.
 - Set people free.
 - Share their food with people who need it.
 - Help house people without shelter.
 - Give clothing to people without it.
- Only then, Isaiah said, would God's people truly be "righteous." That's because God's definition of "righteousness" wasn't about all the religious things they were doing to build themselves up. God's definition of righteousness required them to take their eyes off themselves and take care of others too.
 - Of course, God wants us to pray, spend time in Scripture, and practice spiritual disciplines like fasting. Those are some of the most important tools we have to grow closer to God.
 - But if all of those activities we're doing aren't leading us to be less selfish and more focused on caring for others (especially the people who are most in need, oppressed, or in danger), we've missed something significant!
- It's not just Isaiah who talked about this. This same message can be found all over the Old Testament of the Bible – especially in the words of the prophets like Isaiah, Amos, Micah, and more. Apparently, this is a message we need to keep learning and re-learning.

SCRIPTURE | Matthew 22:36-40

- Long after Isaiah, Jesus delivered a similar message to his followers. Some religious leaders of Jesus' day often disliked the things he did, taught, and spoke about.
 - In large part, that's because Jesus was eager to call out their religious hypocrisy, like Isaiah had once done for God's people.
 - Jesus often told these religious leaders that, while they had some things right when it came to "righteousness," they were missing the big picture.

- Rather than fighting for justice and caring for others, these religious leaders often seemed too worried about their own "righteous" reputations.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 22:36-40.*
- According to Jesus, "righteousness" isn't just about you and your relationship with God. If you're not also loving others like you love yourself, Jesus says you don't have the whole picture!
- Righteousness isn't just about:
 - Going to church.
 - Saying prayers.
 - Doing Bible studies.
 - Singing loudly during your favorite worship song.
 - Following all the rules.
- No, "righteousness" is so much bigger than that. It's about:
 - Humility.
 - Selflessness.
 - Justice.
 - Compassion.
 - And loving the people God loves.

OBJECT LESSON | The Flip Board (Part 2)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Using the same two-sided white board you used earlier, flip it so the Big Idea is made visible.*
- With God, right living isn't about a perfect record of church attendance, prayer, and Bible-reading — not if you're not doing it out of love for God and others. God's righteousness isn't a religious to-do list. It's an invitation to experience and reflect God's love. That's how **God flips our definition of righteousness.**

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

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - What would you say "righteousness" means to God? What would you say it doesn't mean to God?
 - Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. What are some ways a person might try to do what's "righteous," but fail to be loving?
 - * Have you ever thought God's love for you was connected to your ability to be more "righteous"? Do you still think that's true? Why or why not?

OBJECT LESSON | The Flip Board (Part 3)

- If we want to be "righteous," or "live rightly," it's so important to do things that help us know and love God more! But remember, God says our "righteousness" isn't really complete if we're not also loving the people God loves.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Return your white board to its original position so all of the sticky notes are visible. Work with your students to separate the sticky notes of "righteous" actions into two sections: one section of actions that help you love God and one section of actions that help you love others. Add more sticky notes if you come up with additional ideas.*

- It might be tempting to look at this board and think, "So this is my new to-do list? If I want God to be happy with me, on top of going to church and praying, I need to also —"
 - If that crossed your mind, hang on. Remember, this is part of what God's people got wrong in the past. We were never supposed to be doing "righteous" things in order to earn God's approval, attention, or love.
 - Instead, these are all things we can do in response to the love we've already received from God. With Jesus, we're already loved and made righteous! All of these things are simply our response to God's love for us and others.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - *** Which is more difficult for you right now: loving God or loving others? What's making that so difficult?**
 - **This week, what's one way you want to love God better? How can we help?**
 - **This week, what's one way you want to love someone else better? How can we help?**

REFLECTION | On the Flip Side

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Before your program, print and cut the double-sided handouts provided in your Week 2 folder. Place one under each seat, along with a pen. While you teach, invite students to write what they already do, and what they could do more often, to "love God" on one side and to "love others" on the flip side.*
- As you wonder what you can do to live like this, don't forget to:
 - **GET HONEST:** It's okay if you've gotten this wrong in the past. We all have! If you've been so focused on yourself that you've forgotten to love others (even if it was for a "righteous" reason), or if you've been doing "righteous" things in order to earn God's love, get honest with God about it!
 - **ASK FOR HELP:** None of us can be totally "righteous" all the time or in our own strength. That's why we need Jesus so much. Instead of only trying harder to be good or right, ask for God's help. Jesus not only gives us an example of what love looks like — his Spirit also transforms and helps us love.
 - **HSM+: SEE AS GOD SEES.** God created the world and each of us with intentional and wonderful design. When our perspectives are flipped to see as God sees we can chase after God's best for our lives. As you walk through your week, imagine you have glasses on that help you see the world as God sees. What do you think you might see differently this week? Pray and ask God to help you see as He sees.
 - **DO SOMETHING:** Loving God and loving others isn't just about feelings. It's about meaningful actions. We brainstormed a lot of ideas together already, but I wonder how these ideas could translate into your everyday life and faith.
- Remember, righteousness isn't a religious to-do list. It's an invitation to experience and reflect God's love. **God flips our definition of righteousness** — and that sets us free to love and be loved.

